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The Ubiquitous Presence of the Past? Collective Memory and International History

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Abstract

This article explores the relationship between international history and memory studies. It argues that collective memory demands to be taken much more seriously than it has been by international historians to date and clarifies what this might involve. It comprises four sections. The first provides an overview of the growth of memory studies, identifying some recent trends and conceptual issues. The second explores how international historians have engaged with it hitherto, revealing that while memory has emerged onto the agenda of the discipline, with the production of some important studies, analysis of it still remains rather patchy and underdeveloped. It also contextualises a putative turn to memory against the ongoing 'cultural turn' in international history. The third lays out a research agenda by identifying some of the core issues to be differentiated in the study of memory within international history, exploring the conceptual issues these entail and pointing to relevant resources from within the memory studies literature that speak to them. A final section anticipates and discusses some potential objections to the argument of the article. It concludes that taking the challenge of memory studies seriously may demand a thoroughgoing reorientation of our practice.

Key Words: Collective Memory; International History; Cultural Turn;

In March 2011 an earthquake and tsunami devastated Japan's north-eastern coast, claiming almost 19,000 lives and triggering a near-catastrophic nuclear emergency at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. The Japanese prime minister Kan Naoto declared the disaster to be 'the toughest and the most difficult crisis' his country had faced since the end of the Second World War.¹ Reactions in the People's Republic of China (PRC), Japan's neighbour, were complicated. On social media networks and in the press, many commentators vented vehement anti-Japanese feelings grounded in bitterness over aggression and atrocities committed seven decades earlier. After Chinese assistance to the stricken Japanese was mooted, one sixty-six year-old man told a reporter: 'From the humanitarian perspective, I support it. But from a historical perspective, I do not. People my age believe Japan ought to be wiped out. During the Japanese occupation, they killed so many Chinese people.'² Over time responses mellowed, as millions of Chinese internet users clicked on 'pray for Japan' icons and expressed admiration for the stoicism and discipline with which the Japanese public was confronting the disaster. The official response was broadly positive, as the Beijing government not only offered high-profile condolences to Tokyo but also launched a significant humanitarian aid effort. Yet here too, even if it was not the crucial determinant, policy was framed by resentment at Japan's historical crimes and contemporary failure to assume appropriate responsibility for them. Thus an inspired editorial in the *China Youth Daily* asserted: 'Even hatreds, complaints, and conflicts pale into insignificance in the face of huge human disaster. History cannot be forgotten, but it might be forgiven.'³

The prominence of historic trauma as a conditioning factor in the Chinese response is not surprising, since it has been a central element in Sino-Japanese relations over the last few decades.⁴ Within Japan internal debates over the wartime past intensified after the death of the emperor Hirohito in 1989 which gave fresh encouragement and freedom to progressive elements urging frank and critical contemplation of historic crimes. Successive governments

subsequently issued numerous apologies for the nation's past aggressive behaviour, but while these have aroused the ire of unrepentant ultranationalists at home, former victims abroad have generally deemed them limited, grudging and insincere.⁵ Simultaneously, since the turn to reform and especially after the Tiananmen Square crisis of 1989, the Chinese regime has consciously cultivated a new and assertive form of integrative nationalism in which a 'new remembering' of the 'Anti-Japanese War of Resistance' figures absolutely centrally.⁶ It has sponsored a number of high profile new museums, including a revamped Memorial Hall at Nanjing replete with immersive multimedia technology, opened in 2007 on the seventieth anniversary of the notorious massacre perpetrated by the Japanese army.⁷ This propagation of anti-Japanese feeling in the guise of 'patriotic education' has at times appeared almost too successful, threatening to run out of control. In 2005 the Japanese government's sanctioning of new school textbooks that sanitised wartime crimes provoked a wave of popular protests across China, initially encouraged by the authorities; yet the police had to intervene to curtail the demonstrations once they degenerated into violent attacks on Japanese businesses and consular buildings that threatened irreparable harm to relations with Tokyo.⁸ Similarly in 2009 nationalists directed death threats at Lu Chuan, director of a harrowing film about the Nanjing massacre, *City of Life and Death*, for the supposed offence of depicting one Japanese character in something other than utterly hostile terms.⁹

While domestic factors have therefore contributed to the increased salience of the wartime past in political discourse within and between the two countries, changes in systemic context are also pertinent. Some of these are large-scale: the explosive upsurge in the prominence of historical grievances of many kinds is a global phenomenon of the last two decades, and is intimately interconnected with the enunciation and diffusion of new norms of human rights, victimhood and regret.¹⁰ Linked to this is the emergence of new forms of transnational activism seeking reparation and apology for victims of historic abuse. So, for

example, a global coalition of women's groups, lawyers, journalists, human rights activists and non-governmental organisations has agitated on behalf of the Chinese and Korean so-called 'comfort women', forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese military in the war.¹¹

Other contextual changes are more local. The end of the Cold War precipitated a process of regional integration in East Asia with political, economic, demographic and cultural dimensions. Whereas Japan was formerly insulated from its near neighbours by a relatively exclusive orientation towards the United States, the 1990s saw a decisive 'return of Asia'.¹² Moves towards greater interdependence have emboldened the former victims – principally the PRC and the Republic of Korea (ROK) – to demand more fulsome atonement from Japan and impelled the Japanese to pay heed (even if this does not entail simply acceding to them). Of course, this historical politics is not divorced from other issues: each state has to weigh the costs of pressing (or resisting) such claims against the benefits accruing from closer political, economic and cultural relations, and this tends at times to mute polemics over war remembrance. So Sino-Japanese relations mingle acute controversy with gestures of cooperation, reconciliation and rapprochement, such as the visit of a Japanese military delegation to Nanjing in 2008 (on the seventy-first anniversary of the Marco Polo Bridge incident that triggered full scale war between the two countries in 1937).¹³ Yet nonetheless the recurrent flaring up of grievances over historical issues is a persistent phenomenon. The claims and counter-claims on both sides are more than merely rhetorical or instrumental, and they resonate with wider general publics as much as if not more than they animate their leaders. Hence despite hopes that post-tsunami humanitarian collaboration might herald a decisive turn towards more cordial attitudes, in 2012 a long standing dispute over the status of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands – bound up both in concrete and symbolic terms with the legacy of the Second World War – once more erupted and envenomed Sino-Japanese relations.¹⁴

This example demonstrates the pertinence in international politics of what has come to be termed ‘collective memory’. The aim of this article is to explore how international historians have dealt with this phenomenon to date, to argue that it demands to be taken much more seriously and to clarify what this might involve by outlining a research agenda. Apart from the increasing visibility in contemporary international politics of assertive representations of trauma and victimhood, this project is also prompted by intellectual developments. Over the last few decades, memory has become a central concept across the whole historical discipline: as Alon Confino recently noted, for historians memory ‘now governs questions of interpretation, narration, and explanation, perhaps like no other term’.¹⁵ Nor is the growth of memory studies merely a concern for historians, since it is now a vast interdisciplinary enterprise encompassing scholars across the humanities and social sciences. Much of this literature deals with issues that would generally be considered to be within the rightful terrain of international history: war and its legacies; efforts to rebuild peaceful inter-state relations in its aftermath; international and transnational flows of power; and the ideational dimensions of foreign relations.

This creates both a risk and an opportunity. Negatively, there is a danger that scholars driven by different intellectual concerns and writing in different registers will become the dominant scholarly analysts of these phenomena. In 2004 Michael J. Hogan warned diplomatic historians that they were being marginalised as authorised expositors of United States foreign relations, because other historians and interdisciplinary scholars writing on the American past were embarking on international, transnational and global turns; a similar situation prevails today as regards the international politics of memory.¹⁶ More positively, the interdisciplinary scholarship on memory is extremely rich in conceptual and empirical terms, and offers a vast storehouse of relevant material with which international historians can profitably engage. By drawing on, adapting and challenging this work international historians

would be able to make their own distinctive contribution to writing the history of these increasingly important phenomena.

This article comprises four sections. The first provides an overview of the growth of memory studies, identifying some recent trends and conceptual issues. The second explores how international historians – and scholars in International Relations (IR) – have engaged with it hitherto. This survey reveals that while memory has emerged onto the agenda of these disciplines, with the production of some important studies, analysis of it still remains rather patchy and underdeveloped. It also contextualises a putative turn to memory against the ongoing ‘cultural turn’ in international history. The third section lays out a research agenda by identifying some of the core issues to be differentiated in the study of memory within international history, exploring the conceptual issues these entail and pointing to relevant resources from within the memory studies literature that speak to them. A final section anticipates and discusses some potential objections to the argument. It concludes that these are not decisive, and indeed ventures that by the lights of the cutting edge of contemporary memory studies, even the notion of supplementing existing approaches to policy-making with greater consideration of collective memory is far too timid. Taking the challenge of memory studies seriously may in fact demand a much more thoroughgoing reorientation of our practice.

1. The Rise of Memory Studies

The emergence of a distinctive field of memory studies is one of the most notable developments across the humanities and social sciences over the last two decades. It now possesses all the traditional trappings of a mature scholarly enterprise, including dedicated journals, book series, handbooks, readers, discussion lists, specialist conferences, and collaborative research projects and networks.¹⁷ At the heart of this work lies the remembrance of trauma, especially that induced by violence and war. Although it is possible to trace a long

intellectual genealogy for interest in memory, in its modern configuration the preoccupation owes much to the accumulated catastrophic legacies of the two world wars and the Holocaust, and their continuing reverberations as the twentieth century gave way to the twenty-first. From the beginning, this was a thoroughly interdisciplinary enterprise. It was a literary critic, Paul Fussell, who in 1975 produced the pioneering landmark book on the cultural impact of the First World War, *The Great War and Modern Memory*; a dozen years later, the historian Henry Rousso drew eclectically on political, social and cultural sources in *The Vichy Syndrome*, his paradigmatic study of French efforts to come to terms with the experience of the Second World War; between the two, a film studies scholar, Annette Insdorf, had contributed the first edition of her adroit exploration of the visual representation of the Holocaust, *Indelible Shadows*.¹⁸

The field collectively has always been characterised not only by pluralism but by breadth. So it has encompassed a great variety of what Rousso dubbed ‘vectors’ of memory, including films, television and journalism, fiction, museums, memorials and commemorations, official political rhetoric, education, the law, tourism and commerce – ‘each of which has its own history and rules’.¹⁹ The range expanded over time, not least as scholars from more and more disciplines began to attend to how past conflicts had been represented, and with what effects. The field’s geographical scope also grew as remembrance was analysed in more and more regions of the globe and with reference to an escalating number of wars, genocides, dictatorships, natural disasters and other traumata. What drove this scholarship was not mere abstract curiosity about the persistent presence of various pasts in the contemporary world. Rather these secular processes of working through trauma were conceived as intimately related to social power relations, and memory came to be regarded as a fundamental technology of identity. Memory and identity, indeed, were ‘mutually constitutive’.²⁰ ‘The core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely, a sense of sameness over time and

space, is sustained by remembering; and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity.²¹ So the unfolding of the after-effects of war or genocide was not some kind of natural phenomenon, but rather a complex social and political process. To debate the meaning of past catastrophic experiences was to draw boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, to define core values, to create social solidarity and to orientate a community for future action.

Much work in the field was, and remains, organised around the nation state. War generates existential anxieties for participating nations, and rebuilding national communities after it necessarily requires retrospective negotiation of its crimes, sacrifices, suffering and triumphs. Hence processes of post-war reconstruction involve the propagation of particular visions of the wartime past, embodying specific understandings of how diverse experiences should be comprehended, and generally tending towards a reaffirmation of patriotic self-esteem that enables the nation to move forward. This is not an abstract or impersonal process, of course, for particular agents are at work, pursuing their own agendas in the name of the nation. So regimes, governments and political factions in democracies and dictatorships alike deploy selective readings of past wars to enhance their own legitimacy and to mobilise the public to support particular policies. This high-level engineering of national identity through the play of elite discourses is manifestly important. The activities through which authorised official narratives are spread are also highly visible and well-documented (and therefore easily susceptible to academic analysis). Yet lately much more attention has been paid to memory work at sub-state levels. Putatively unitary national communities are always simultaneously cross cut by competing markers of identity - of gender, class, ethnicity, region, religion, political affiliation and occupational status. Such sub-national groups consume would-be dominant narratives in diverse ways, often contesting them and asserting the primacy of alternative meanings or experiences.²² This resistance is one of the core means

whereby collective memories shift over time, as dynamic processes of contestation lead to the elaboration of more critical and frank accounts, or at least of a wider spectrum of alternative perspectives in the public sphere.

Recently, focus has shifted beyond the state in a different sense, with a turn towards comparative approaches exploring remembrance within wider regions or groups of states united by common experiences - say, of defeat or occupation. This move helps to highlight generic and larger factors at work that national approaches, which often unavoidably tend towards particularism or exceptionalism, can obscure.²³ The latest trend is towards transnational methodologies, exploring the flow of particular memories between and across states and regions, and even around the entire globe.²⁴ Here there is often an emphasis on what Marianne Hirsch has called 'connective' relations.²⁵ For example, Michael Rothberg coined the term 'multidirectional memory' to connote the way in which memories of quite different traumata – in his case the Holocaust and wars of decolonisation – multiply interact across national and temporal boundaries, in so doing fuelling and intensifying rather than obscuring each other.²⁶ The establishment and diffusion of broader norms, typically propagated not just by states but by a range of other agents, is another key concern. The recent emergence of norms of human rights and victimhood, and the global dissemination of a cosmopolitan form of Holocaust memory, are crucial here.²⁷ In a globalised and networked world the notion of the nation state as a rigid, impermeable or even primary container for memory seems increasingly problematic.

Like any scholarly field, memory studies has blind spots, ambiguities and lacunae. Although it has developed an increasingly sophisticated conceptual apparatus, there are persistent calls for greater rigour and the taming of semantic promiscuity. There is, in truth, little consensus even over the very name of the field. 'Memory' might seem like an innocuous signifier but some scholars reject it as an inappropriate transfer of a personal and

psychological faculty into the realm of the collective and social. For Jay Winter, ‘memory’ is an over-inflated concept, too broad and abstract to use in social analysis, and he advocates instead ‘remembrance’. ‘To privilege “remembrance” is to insist on specifying agency, on answering the question who remembers, when, where, and how?’²⁸ ‘Memory’ might also mislead in so far as it directs our attention to content rather than process. As Joanna Bourke has argued, ‘the collective does not possess a memory, only barren sites upon which individuals inscribe shared narratives, infused with power relations’.²⁹ The use of a noun rather than a verb may therefore be flawed: ‘in truth ... there is no such thing as memory; there is only the activity of remembering.’³⁰ Debate also rages over the most suitable adjectival qualifier. ‘Collective memory’ has acquired wide currency, but others prefer to speak of ‘national’, ‘social’, ‘cultural’ or ‘public’ remembering. (Of course, the variation arises in part because different forms of mnemonic activity are being studied by different practitioners.) Numerous other methodological critiques have also been levelled. Wulf Kansteiner, for example, has accused practitioners of being too concerned with just reading representations rather than investigating how they were produced and consumed, and of paying insufficient attention to the ways in which all representations are informed and constrained by the pre-existing narrative resources and historical imaginations of given cultures.³¹ More thoroughgoing objections condemn the whole enterprise as a self-indulgent flight from critical scholarship – a ‘therapeutic alternative to historical discourse’ – or lament a wallowing in a disabling ‘surfeit of memory’.³² Yet others insist that this is a scholarly trend that may soon pass.³³

For the purposes of this piece, it is necessary to bracket most of these issues. Where terminology is concerned, my preference is to use ‘collective memory’ and ‘collective remembrance’, and to use them fairly interchangeably: for all their metaphorical character and flaws as descriptors, these have now become established umbrella terms. I am also

operating with a very broad definition of what constitutes remembering, following Alon Confino's line that 'the study of memory explores how a social group, be it a family, a class, or a nation, constructs a past through a process of invention and appropriation, and what it means to the relationship of power within society. Differently expressed, the historian of memory considers who wants whom to remember what and why, and how memory is produced, received, and rejected.'³⁴ This definition captures how memory is a constructed artefact rather than a relic or reproduction of the past, and always partial, plural, malleable and contested. Moreover, while paying due regard to scholarly critiques of the validity of the enterprise, it seems incontestable that the emergence of the analytic of memory has – in Confino's words again – 'brought to the fore topics and uncovered knowledge that were simply unknown a generation ago'.³⁵

There is a further substantial reason to pay heed to the emergence of memory studies. This is no mere academic tendency, but a development rooted in profound changes in the social world. Granted, the rise of memory owes something to intellectual and institutional shifts such as the broad constructionist turn underway in the human sciences since the 1980s, the shift from society to culture as the prime locus of explanation and the increasing legitimacy of contemporary history, oral history, and interdisciplinary methodologies drawn from anthropology, psychology, sociology and cultural studies.³⁶ Yet it is also both component and reflection of a much wider 'memory boom' that has exploded in recent decades, leading to the greatly enhanced presence of the past in public culture across myriad discourses. This encompasses proliferating public commemorative events, the accelerated building of museums and memorials, unprecedented reckonings with the past in war crimes trials, international tribunals, truth and reconciliation commissions, and state apologies, and a massive surge of interest in personal genealogy, historical re-enactment, heritage tourism and history on television.

Memory studies thus coalesced in a world saturated with representations of the past and memorialising impulses. Operative factors driving this boom include the rise of Holocaust consciousness and associated human rights norms, and the new forms of ‘identity politics’ that these have spawned. Equally pertinent are the effects of generational change (especially the passing of the Second World War generation), increased affluence and leisure time and the new possibilities for consumption and exchange of representations of the past created by digital networked technology.³⁷ But underlying these is arguably a more profound shift: the obsession with memory is a product of processes of globalisation, geopolitical upheaval, disconcertingly rapid technological transformations and the bankruptcy of modernity’s great utopian ideologies that have engendered an intense and multifaceted ‘insecurity about identity’.³⁸ What Fredric Jameson termed ‘nostalgia for the present’ thus spells ‘the desire for holding onto the familiar, for fixing and retaining the lineaments of worlds in motion, of landmarks that are disappearing and securities that are unsettled’.³⁹ It is a matter of taste whether this obsessive retrospection should be construed in negative or positive terms - as indicative of an ‘exhaustion of utopian energies’ or of resistance to ‘the synchronised “hyper-space” of globalisation’⁴⁰ – but it would be rash to dismiss it as a mere passing fad.

2. Engaging Memory

The case for international historians to engage more intensively with memory studies thus rests on three key points: the fact that much of its subject matter directly overlaps with our core concerns in international politics; its vibrancy and fertility; and its entwinement with profound sociological changes reshaping the world around us. Of course, many international historians are resistant to entreaties to rejuvenate practice through interdisciplinary borrowing, resenting the implication that we should always strive to follow scholarly fashion or that there is something amiss with traditional approaches. This may help to explain why, to

date, explicit engagement with collective memory within international history has been somewhat limited.

What engagement there has been is generally perceived as an element in the broader ‘cultural turn’ of the last two decades. ‘Culturalist’ international historians have broken new ground by examining the role of beliefs about race, class, gender, religion and national identity in policy-making, and exploring how these have conditioned the exercise of political, economic and military power.⁴¹ Some landmark surveys of the ‘culturalist’ literature have mentioned memory as an important theme, highlighting in particular work on the deployment in decision-making of ‘historical analogies that arouse emotions and exert prescriptive force’.⁴² Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson similarly acknowledged the significance of memory by including a new chapter on the topic in the second edition of their *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations* in 2004. In this Robert D. Schulzinger discussed the literature on the use of analogies in policy-making and the broader scholarship on collective remembrance of war, with particular reference to the case of the United States and the successive traumas of the Second World War, Vietnam and 9/11. Schulzinger’s approach was wide-ranging, covering topics as diverse as films, museums and memorials, and the emergence of post-traumatic stress disorder. He also firmly concluded that international historians would profit from paying more attention to ‘the role that memories play in determining how people conduct their affairs’. Yet his analysis remained rather vague and imprecise, neglecting to engage in any depth with the new conceptual tools being elaborated by memory studies. Moreover, although he canvassed the burgeoning literature on national collective memories of conflict, and asserted that it ‘provided excellent evidence for historians of U.S. foreign relations’, he offered no precise guidance as to what exactly they should do with it to illuminate international politics.⁴³

There have been some incisive contributions dealing with the legacy of the Vietnam War, which has been of enduring interest owing to its traumatic impact and the bitter polemic that has surrounded its remembrance. In a high-profile piece on the war and American society in *Diplomatic History*, Robert J. McMahon explicitly drew on the memory studies literature and recognised that bringing this into conversation with international history was part of a ‘broader culturalist trend’. His analysis operated on three levels, first exploring the shaping of the meaning of Vietnam in the rhetoric of presidents and high level officials, then turning to broader public and congressional clashes over its memory, and finally unpicking ‘the crucial influence exerted by popular culture’ in shaping national collective memories of the conflict. Whilst thus noting the multiple levels and discourses on and through which they were fashioned, McMahon also highlighted the plural, constructed and contested nature of collective memories. He also emphasised precisely why memory mattered in American foreign relations. The battle over memory was ‘in the deepest sense, a struggle over national identity, ‘inseparable from the ongoing debate about America’s present, and future, role in the world’, and ‘intimately tied to practical, presentist questions about when and where to use U.S. power outside the country’. Collective memory was a vital component of the fabric of American being in the world, crucial in determining external orientation and action.⁴⁴

Other work more squarely broached the international implications of remembering Vietnam. Edwin A. Martini’s study of the post-1975 *American War on Vietnam* stressed how the hostility evident in official American policy after the formal cessation of hostilities was paralleled in popular culture representations of the former enemy and conflict; combining analysis of White House documents and congressional debates with readings of comics, films and memorials, he suggestively posited that politics and culture ‘were driven by the same cultural logic’.⁴⁵ Scott Laderman explored the mutual implication of the same two realms in his study of American and Vietnamese representations of the conflict – and each other – in

guide books, armed forces guides, tourist literature and museums. He demonstrated how American writing in these genres tended to present the war in ways which continued to legitimate the exertion of American power abroad, and how Vietnamese material perceptibly mellowed through the post-war decades, evolving in line with the twists and turns of domestic reforms and foreign policy adjustments.⁴⁶ If these interventions tended to reveal much more about American perceptions than those of the Vietnamese, other international historians such as Mark P. Bradley explored memory work from the ‘other side’ in more detail, thus contributing to a larger interdisciplinary endeavour.⁴⁷ By the same token, and in line with larger trends, some other recent work has highlighted the transnational forces at work, arguing that the war’s legacies ‘shape and are shaped by dynamics that transcend the two countries’.⁴⁸

International historians have also paid some attention to the collective memory of the Second World War. In the mid-1990s, in the shadow of the controversy over the exhibiting of the *Enola Gay* at the Smithsonian Institute, Michael J. Hogan edited a collection on *Hiroshima in History and Memory*. This contained high-quality essays, though there was some variation in how far contributors dealt with the memory as opposed to the history or legacy of the Pacific War’s brutal end-game, and with the extent of their engagement with the broader endeavour of collective memory.⁴⁹ Subsequently, *Diplomatic History* published a forum on ‘the future of World War II studies’ which surveyed the topic from diverse conceptual and geographical perspectives. Here, too, approaches varied: some of the pieces most attuned to the concerns of memory studies were written by scholars not primarily located within international history, and other contributors seemed decidedly sceptical about its merits.⁵⁰ Some significant stand-alone pieces on similar topics have also appeared in the leading journals. These include Brian C. Etheridge’s prize-winning 2009 study of how German identity was negotiated and contested in war films in the Cold War United States,

and Barak Kushner's detailed analysis of neo-nationalist graphic novels on the China war in post-Cold War Japan.⁵¹ There have also been some monograph treatments of aspects of the collective memory of the conflict, such as Emily Rosenberg's account of the remembrance of Pearl Harbor in the United States and Patrick Finney's comparative exploration of the interconnections between international history writing on the origins of the war and broader discourses of collective memory.⁵² To these can be added a range of pieces on various other conflicts which take diverse conceptual and methodological approaches, some fairly traditional, but do all engage in one way or another with the problematic of memory.⁵³

It seems reasonable to conclude from this survey that despite rising awareness of memory and the appearance of some excellent interventions, the overall quantity of international history work engaging with the concerns of memory studies is not vast. Some important overviews of 'culturalist' practice indeed still fail to acknowledge it.⁵⁴ Moreover, in palpable contrast to the cases of other 'culturalist' analysands such as race and gender, no real critical mass of scholars with a sense of collective purpose has yet emerged.

In trying to enhance their engagement, international historians might fruitfully draw on work done by our near neighbours in IR. In his introduction to a landmark edited collection on *Memory, Trauma and World Politics*, Duncan Bell asserted that, in stark contrast to the trend sweeping other disciplines, 'the analysis of memory has not played a substantial role in the academic study of international relations'.⁵⁵ This claim is somewhat ironic from our perspective, since however accurate the comparison Bell was making with anthropology, sociology and cultural studies, the volume of such work in IR is rather greater than that in international history. This may reflect IR scholars' higher level of comfort with conceptual and theoretical discourse. (This is certainly the case with Bell who has made an original contribution to the conceptual debates in memory studies, coining the term 'mythscape' to describe the discursive realm where personal recall of lived experiences and second-order

political usages of the past come into contact to forge and reforge notions of national identity.⁵⁶) Equally, it may owe something to the fact that IR scholars are more accustomed to writing about the contemporary world, in which the intertwined issues of remembrance, reparations and human rights have become obsessively salient lately. This last point might be supported by the appearance of important work on the role of historical memories in the Yugoslav wars of succession in the 1990s and on the conflicting play of metaphors in western thinking about the subsequent Kosovo crisis.⁵⁷ By the same token, political discourse around the ‘war on terror’ since the attacks of 9/11 (themselves construed by the president of the United States George W. Bush in his diary on the day as ‘the Pearl Harbor of the 21st century’⁵⁸) has been saturated with historical metaphors and analogies, especially ones relating to the Second World War and the Holocaust.⁵⁹

The field now possesses impressive edited collections covering numerous cases and showcasing different conceptual concerns. Bell’s book brought a diverse collection of IR scholars together to explore the relationship between memory and trauma in world politics, highlighting memory’s role in national identity formation, the emergent transnational and global features of memory practices and their intersection with issues of justice, morality and ethics.⁶⁰ Earlier, Jan-Werner Müller had edited an interdisciplinary collection on *Memory and Power in Postwar Europe* which covered a range of cases from all parts of the continent, discussing the role of memories in foreign policy-making and domestic politics, and determined to illuminate the pathways and mechanisms whereby they ‘come to have real political consequences’.⁶¹ Eric Langenbacher and Yossi Shain widened the geographical frame in their collection *Power and the Past*, encompassing the United States and East Asia as well as European cases, and with a particular focus on the period since 9/11.⁶² Similarly, Dovile Budryte and Erica Resende have published a collection on *Memory and Trauma in International Relations*, which covers the impact of natural disasters and truth and

reconciliation commissions alongside the more familiar conflict-focused cases.⁶³ The question of trauma has proved particularly intriguing for poststructuralist scholars. Jenny Edkins has explored the tensions between the memories of individuals traumatised by war and other forms of violence and the efforts of states to instrumentalise those experiences through formal commemorative practices.⁶⁴ Similarly, Maja Zehfuss foregrounded ethical concerns in her discussion of the *Wounds of Memory* in post-1945 Germany, deprecating how particular forms of dubious ‘good war’ myth could be utilised to justify further bloodshed and warning against the very notion that memories can provide any sort of secure or ethical guide for political action.⁶⁵

It is perhaps predictable that together with poststructuralists it is IR scholars inclined towards constructivism who have made the most signal contributions here. The notion that behaviour is ‘socially constructed, historically determined, and culturally contingent’ is obviously more conducive to taking collective memory seriously than the underpinning universalising investments of realism.⁶⁶ So, for example, Thomas U. Berger has explored how ‘collective memories serve an important practical function. They provide the collectivity with an identity and a common myth of origin. They endow it with emotional and normative underpinning. They simplify the task of organising collective action by providing its members with a common language and set of understandings about how the world functions and ought to function.’⁶⁷ He brought these insights to bear in a major comparative study of how Germany, Japan and Austria have come to terms with their wartime pasts, in the process arguing that ‘instead of fading with time’ the memory of the Second World War is now ‘more contentious – and more potent – than ever’.⁶⁸ Similarly, Richard Ned Lebow has written extensively on the subject, not least through co-editing an important collection on European memories of the Second World War in which he asserted that ‘the politics of memory will be a salient feature of the European landscape for many decades to come’.⁶⁹ This said, however,

there is no inherent reason why scholars from other theoretical traditions cannot also engage the phenomenon. So a theme issue of the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* in 2008 on the ‘politics of history in comparative perspective’ showcased a variety of approaches.⁷⁰ Equally, scholars such as Jennifer Lind, who has worked on apologies in international politics, and Yinan He, who has explored post-1945 Sino-Japanese and German-Polish reconciliation on a comparative basis, have laboured hard to persuade colleagues in mainstream American political science that memory deserves serious consideration.⁷¹

Despite such welcome intimations of pluralism, it seems likely that the realist-inflected mainstreams of international history and IR will continue in general to regard issues of collective memory as essentially ‘symbolic sideshows’, a distraction from ‘the more concrete forces believed to really drive politics, such as the balance of power and considerations of material interests’.⁷² Of course, the core issues of explanation entailed here have been much debated in relation to the general challenge of ‘culturalism’ and the terms of the debate do not really change simply because collective memory is the particular cultural filament in play. Thus Müller has argued that the point of invoking memory is ‘not to deny that interests shape policy’ but rather ‘to examine the historically and ideologically conditioned construction of these interests’. Admitting that memory matters does not mean denying that ‘at any given moment the balance of power or the incentives of international regimes [may] decisively influence behaviour’ – but it does mean insisting that the way in which that influence operates is ‘shaped by political culture’. While there are ‘serious methodological questions’ to be worked through here, and ‘precise causal chains will always be difficult to establish’, a focus on memory does not portend a collapse into a world of pure representation.⁷³ These arguments have been extensively rehearsed already without persuading most mainstream scholars, so it seems probable that the greatest future contribution to developing the potential

of collective memory will be made by constructivists in IR and ‘culturalists’ within international history. It is the latter that this piece seeks specifically to galvanise, animated by a conviction that connecting international history more closely with the vibrant field of memory studies can bring fresh vigour and purpose to the ‘culturalist’ project.

3. Taking Memory Seriously: A Research Agenda

What precisely would such an engagement entail? The terrain of collective memory in international politics is constituted by a wide range of different activities and phenomena, but it is helpful to think about four key realms of inquiry.

3.1 Decision-Making and Collective Memories

The most obvious starting point is the role of collective memories within foreign policy-making deliberation and discussion. Here there is an existing body of literature - long pre-dating the cultural turn - on the role of analogies and how policy-makers ‘think in time’ which can serve as a foundation.⁷⁴ This venerable sub-genre foreshadows the approaches and concerns of memory studies in various respects. Thus it is itself often inter-disciplinary, not only straddling the permeable border between international history and IR but also drawing important insights from other areas of political science, psychology and geography.⁷⁵ It is also attentive to the interaction of different analogies and precedents at particular points in time, as in Yuen Foong Khong’s study of how arguments drawn from the Korean War, Munich and Dien Bien Phu intersected in the making of the 1965 Vietnam decisions in the United States.⁷⁶ Further, it also thoughtfully distinguishes between different kinds of memory work in policy-making – instinctive advocacy as against systematic analysis of a range of alternatives, for example – and offers insightful thoughts about its dynamics, and how ideational factors interacted with a range of other policy determinants.

Beyond this dedicated sub-genre, it is commonplace for international historians writing on the foreign relations of particular states to consider the legacy of trauma or the

salience of historical parallels in the ‘mental maps’ of politicians and diplomats.⁷⁷ For example, historians of appeasement in the 1930s have long noted how British policy-makers were oppressed by memories of the sanguinary futility of the First World War in seeking to avert a second: in reading Neville Chamberlain’s private diaries and letters, Larry W. Fuchser argued, ‘one is continually impressed by the degree to which historical memory, both personal and public, informed [his] perception of events in the years leading up to the Second World War’.⁷⁸ Equally, the significance of ‘ideology and memory’ as intertwined determinants shaping the worldviews of both American and Soviet policy-makers in the Cold War has been acknowledged by many specialists.⁷⁹ That inquiry in this vein continues to flourish is evidenced by the substantial literature on the operation of the ‘Vietnam syndrome’ in recent American foreign relations.⁸⁰

‘Culturalism’ has expanded our conception of policy-making by invoking the importance of the influence of a range of cultural beliefs in the process, including collective memories. So it is a natural progression to suggest that international historians might consider the role of memories in greater detail, and more systematically and assiduously attend to evidence of their role in decision-making. Of course, evaluating the precise role of memories as against other material and ideational determinants is complex, as is tracking the relationship between the invocation of memories and actual behaviour. Yet these are precisely tasks that should be forwarded by analytical exploration of the mechanics and dynamics of memory in concrete empirical contexts. By the same token, it is undeniably challenging to maintain a sharp distinction between collective memories and the other analysands of interest to ‘culturalists’, such as race, gender and national identity. So, for example, it is a matter of definitional delicacy where to draw a line between, on the one hand, collective memories and, on the other, the myths foundational to American national identity identified by Walter L. Hixson.⁸¹ Yet this would not mark a categorically new problem for

‘culturalist’ international history work: Hixson’s myths are also emphatically gendered and raced and so previous work has already had to negotiate the fact of overlaps between these diverse cultural factors.

Moreover, approaching these issues with a more pronounced mnemonic sensibility would build upon the insights of the traditional literature but extend its reach and generate new insights. Many existing studies of the role of analogies in decision-making are very narrowly focused upon the process of bureaucratic deliberation and the logic or otherwise of policy-makers’ reasoning; indeed, in some cases the avowed purpose of the exercise is to optimise how decision-makers ‘*use* experience, whether remote or recent, in the process of deciding what to do today about the prospect for tomorrow’.⁸² Implicit here is a particular form of rational actor model in which policy-makers are presumed to be free, if they so choose, to ‘use history more discriminatingly’ and wittingly, and to interrogate a range of ‘alternative analogies and parallels’ rather than being encapsulated by ‘the first that comes to mind’.⁸³ Doubtless there may be some cases where this kind of coolly reflective cogitation has occurred, but in general – and from both a ‘culturalist’ and a memory studies perspective – this approach seems sorely to understate the power of collective memories. Memories are not so much tools to be employed, as part of the cluster of constitutive cultural elements – what Andrew J. Rotter, following Max Weber and Clifford Geertz, has termed the ‘webs of significance’ – that create our worldview.⁸⁴ Memory is not always simply our master, and of course there are occasions when policy-makers seek consciously to wield it instrumentally, yet nonetheless as Rotter argues, the influence of such webs is inescapable. ‘People are not only the makers of webs but also their subtle victims; they can become enmeshed in the filaments that they or others have made and become dependent on the webs for sustenance and security. Enmeshed or not, all of us see the world through these shimmering networks of meaning.’⁸⁵ In his landmark book, Ernest R. May adduces a parade of case studies of flawed

usages of historical reasoning in American foreign policy to ground his argument for a more considered and sophisticated deployment of the past; yet a more logical conclusion to draw from this very evidence might be that his call is essentially in vain.⁸⁶

The issue of affect is central to the dynamics of collective memories in these decision-making processes. The potent emotional pull of collective memories is crucial to their psychological and social significance, and has consequently been much investigated within the memory studies literature.⁸⁷ Simultaneously, an important recent strand of ‘culturalist’ international history has focused on the affective and emotional aspects of policy-making, most notably in Frank Costigliola’s work on American president Franklin Delano Roosevelt.⁸⁸ There are multiple points of connection between the former work on the embodiment of collective memories, and the deep resonance of personal and collective past experiences, and the latter on the imbrication of reason and ‘emotional beliefs’ or ‘dispositions’ in policy-making and the practices of diplomacy.⁸⁹ Of course, there is also a wider flourishing general literature on the history of emotions which speaks to the same issues; bringing these diverse bodies of work into conversation will yield considerable new analytical insights.⁹⁰

The other crucial benefit that a more explicitly memory studies-driven approach would deliver here is to emphasise how the play of the past in policy-making discourse is embedded in broader social contexts and frameworks of understanding. True, such connections have been broached by international historians interested in how far the ideas and assumptions underpinning particular policies have been shared by public opinion – so, as in the case of Neville Chamberlain, exploring how far public anti-war sentiment was a determinant of appeasement. But this has not always been interrogated especially systematically, nor treated as a complex dynamic process of resonation, mobilisation, recognition and contestation rather than a background conditioning factor.⁹¹

3.2 Political Culture, National Identity and Collective Memories

This broader social context within which processes of remembrance unfold thus constitutes a second realm of inquiry. The nation-state remains the pre-eminent community relevant here, though as noted it is increasingly rare to treat it as a self-contained or homogeneous entity. The memory studies literature has elucidated the nature and content of diverse national memory cultures. We now know that official management of the memory of conflict in its aftermath is ubiquitous, since it is deemed essential to heal the social wounds of war, to reconstruct national unity and also to enhance the legitimacy of particular political systems, regimes or governments. Equally, we have already noted the diverse means through which narratives designed to achieve these goals can be disseminated, including formal propaganda, more quotidian state rhetoric, commemorations, the dedication of memorials and museums, education and the mass media, and war crime trials and reparation policies. The content of the stories articulated can vary widely in content and tone. Sometimes these comprise aggressive unrepentance or triumphal glorification, at other times they incarnate sincere apologies and desires for reconciliation, and at yet others embody complex amalgams of evasive amnesia or self-pitying contrition.

This said, analysing the dense field of national memory work cannot simply restrict itself to exploration of the explicit mnemonic engineering of elites. For one thing, elites are themselves multiply constrained in their freedom of manoeuvre here, as suggested by Thomas U. Berger's model in which political instrumentalisation is hedged on the one hand by the actual nature of historical experience and on the other by the norms and narrative resources of the broader national culture.⁹² (There are many similar models: Eric Langenbacher has coined the term 'memory regimes' to describe the network of collective memories, political values, communal identities and supportive moral and ethical discourses that comprise the terrain of national remembering.⁹³) On the one hand, to be successful

would-be hegemonic collective memories must be consonant with the magnitude and nature of the historical events being recalled.⁹⁴ Of course, these characteristics are not independent of perception so perhaps it would be better to say that official frameworks must resonate with individual lived experience. In the case of the Soviet Union, for example, it has been demonstrated that the official mythology of the ‘Great Patriotic War, for all its falsehoods and omissions, nonetheless fulfilled some basic emotional needs for those that had lived through the conflict, endowing their suffering and sacrifice with patriotic meaning.⁹⁵ The myth would never have endured so long had it not achieved ‘an effective fusion of personal and public imagination’.⁹⁶ On the other hand, official memory work must also attend to ‘the semantic and narrative parameters of social remembrance that inform and limit the historical imagination of the members of any given collective’.⁹⁷ This will shape the kinds of emplotments that are available and likely to prove effective: so James V. Wertsch has argued that the post-1945 myth of the ‘Great Patriotic War’ was itself dependent on a much more deep-rooted ‘schematic narrative template’ centred on the trope of ‘triumph over alien forces’ in Russian history, whereby a peaceful Russian people is assailed by an aggressive outsider, leading to a period of existential danger and suffering before an eventual rousing heroic triumph.⁹⁸

Even this does not exhaust the variables to be considered. The process of instrumentalisation itself merits further interrogation, especially – again - as regards the degree of intentionality behind it. Despite undoubted instances of conscious and even cynical efforts to massage memory in particular directions, in general the utility of this kind of understanding is limited. Policy-makers more often appear to be themselves thoroughly encapsulated by the narratives they disseminate, believing passionately in their accuracy and appropriateness. The myriad occasions when they avow the same understandings, rooted in a cluster of ideological values and other commitments, in private discussion as in public

discourse support this view.⁹⁹ By the same token, a broad perspective often reveals that similar narratives to those embodied in official memory policies will emerge simultaneously or flourish independently in other discourses across the broader culture. So, for example, official mnemonic policy in early post-war western Germany was disposed to present Nazism as an almost inexplicable aberration in national history, the product either of supernatural forces and the specific demonic genius of Hitler or of broader impersonal tendencies characteristic of modernity; these same tropes were very widely echoed across literature, film, historiography and in memoirs and diary accounts.¹⁰⁰ This suggests that the roots of such narratives lie other than simply in the witting strategic decisions of individual agents. (There are many affinities between the ways in which memory studies scholars have wrestled with the issue of the constraining of agency by deeper cultural structures and debates within ‘culturalism’ on the same subject, as evidenced for example by Peter Jackson’s discussion of Pierre Bourdieu’s thought and international history.¹⁰¹ Further cross fertilization between here would be mutually profitable.)

The fashioning of memory cultures also involves the erection of taboos around certain issues, and the maintenance of silences. The repressed or simply passed over can sometimes be more significant and eloquent than the spoken. For Jay Winter, silence falls between remembering and forgetting, and takes at least three forms - the liturgical, the politico-strategic and the essentialist – each with subtly different characteristics, serving different purposes and capable of evincing a wide range of political and moral valences. Considering silence also further complicates the issue of agency: there are certainly instances of socially negotiated agreement to draw a veil over certain painful episodes in the interests of psychological healing or political accommodation, such as was done with the memory of the civil war after the restoration of democracy in Spain the late 1970s. Yet these can often be tacit rather than explicit.¹⁰² It should also be noted that memory can also take concrete form,

when readings of the past are embodied in the establishment of new constitutions, political systems or sets of socio-economic arrangements, as with the post-1945 consensus in Great Britain.¹⁰³ Over time, such arrangements can build normative expectations and shape political culture and social life in profound yet subtle ways. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that such activity can function simultaneously on diverse levels, on the one hand disseminating a specific narrative of a recent conflict to shape attitudes towards the national community or former enemies and on the other, at a deeper level, domesticating trauma in order to reinscribe the sovereign order *per se*.¹⁰⁴

Operative within each of the three elements of Berger's model is the additional factor of active contestation of putatively hegemonic discourses by other individuals and groups within society. This is heavily emphasised within the contemporary memory studies literature. Wulf Kansteiner, for example, has characterised the development of collective memories as involving three interacting factors: 'the intellectual and cultural traditions that frame all our representations of the past, the memory makers who selectively adopt and manipulate these traditions, and the memory consumers who use, ignore, or transform such artifacts according to their own interests'.¹⁰⁵ This dimension of consumption and refashioning is vital to understand the difference between potential and actual collective memories, and how aspirations to hegemonise particular readings of the past across a wider society are tempered in practice. (The interaction between 'official' and 'non-official' elements in the model should also be construed as perpetual and circular rather than sequential and linear.) By the same token, this calls us to attend to the whole panoply of discourses within which memories can be debated, negotiated and transformed. For example, although we should be wary of attributing consistent qualities or powers to particular cultural 'vectors', and even more careful about linking decisive changes in memory cultures to single representations, there are myriad cases within the literature on Second World War collective memory where

landmark films seem to have catalysed broader societal processes of contestation: witness Marcel Ophüls' *The Sorrow and the Pity* which helped trigger more critical reckoning with collaboration in France in the 1970s.¹⁰⁶ Very often film-makers have acted as memory activists or entrepreneurs, revising or demolishing official narratives and disrupting agreement over taboos. The memory studies literature offers ample evidence of how such interventions come to pass and the circumstances in which they can succeed or fail.

It might be objected that charting these broad social processes, and this dense field of memory work and signification, takes us some way away from the concerns of international history. Yet a key contribution of 'culturalism' has been to expand the terrain of what counts as relevant in policy-making, exploring the mutual implication and parallel logics of ideas about race, class and gender in policy-making and popular culture; this has opened up new questions about the sources of the ideational aspects of foreign policy, and also about the ideological work that foreign policy does – at home and abroad – in sustaining particular structures of assumptions and forms of power relations. The expansive and interdisciplinary reach of memory studies promises to continue and intensify this process of expansion, with specific reference to representations of the past. Understanding these broad social debates – and deeper belief structures within society – is essential to contextualise the way in which policy-makers think about the past in policy formulation and to gauge how and why particular official efforts to shape memories in certain ways in the service of domestic and foreign policy goals come to pass and their relative efficacy.

By the same token, collective remembrance is a prime means whereby collectivities locate themselves in time and space, in emotional, intellectual, political and ethical terms, and it thus both constrains and enables the nation's actions externally. Duncan Bell has argued that 'memory plays a major role in determining the dynamics of individual and collective identity formation, which in turn shape both perceptions and political action'; put another

way, interpretations of the past ‘help to frame the horizon of the future’.¹⁰⁷ The example of the Federal Republic of Germany can again serve as evidence here, since a close and reciprocal connection can be traced between domestic debates over the meaning of the Nazi past and shifts in German foreign policy in the post-Cold War era. As German foreign policy has moved to embrace a more assertive stance abroad, especially in the context of interventions increasingly justified by humanitarian concerns, so the dominant mnemonic injunction attached to the nation’s burdensome past has shifted: since at least the 1999 Kosovo crisis the older maxim of ‘never again war’ has been strongly challenged by that of ‘never again Auschwitz’.¹⁰⁸ The terrain of collective remembrance within different societies thus merits further investigation both in relation to how it constitutes the context for decision-making and how it operates as a general shaping and enabling framework for external relations.

3.3 Collective Memory in International Relations

This brings us to the international dimension proper, which is the third realm of activity that we need to consider. There is copious contemporary and historical evidence that collective memories can impact upon the course of international relations in diverse and significant ways. As just discussed, memories are constitutive of national political culture which naturally influences what particular states will seek to do and the values they will promote in foreign affairs. Moreover, particular narratives or societal dispositions (either perceived or actual) demonstrably have the capacity to engender friction in the international arena when former combatants remember past conflicts or quarrels in incompatible ways. Of course, myriad variables are involved on all sides in determining the existence, nature, extent and intensity of such mnemonic conflicts. These include: the destructiveness of the original conflict; the flagrancy or enormity of crimes perpetrated and traumatic atrocities inflicted; the nature of any subsequent regime change and related disavowal of past (national) policies; and

post-war geopolitical configurations, which may either perpetuate antagonisms, incentivise reconciliation or super-impose new tensions and rivalries over historic grievances. Each of these variables will, of course, also shift over time, as has happened in East Asia to engender the vociferous ‘history wars’ of the last two decades.

Disputes might be located at diverse points along a spectrum with specific and concrete issues at one end and much more abstract and symbolic ones at the other. Conflicts can, of course, arise over very material issues such as border disputes, questions of reparation and restitution, or the demand for legal proceedings against perpetrators. An interesting case here is that of German-Czech relations which since the end of the Second World War have been bedevilled by mutual resentments arising from wartime oppression, post-war population expulsions and associated compensation demands; changed circumstances since the end of the Cold War have enabled considerable progress on these issues, with the exchange of a series of apologies.¹⁰⁹ Yet such cases inexorably shade into the symbolic, where what is at stake beneath the material are issues of repentance, apology and regret, or respect, construed as vital to reassure former victims or antagonists that the security threats of the past have been decisively transcended and crimes made good through admission of guilt and broader responsibility.

The memory politics of contemporary Eastern Europe provide ample illustration of the intermingling of the concrete and the symbolic. The former communist countries there, especially the Baltic states and Poland, have since the end of the Cold War – but with escalating intensity in the last decade – struggled to come to terms simultaneously with the legacies of post-war communism and of Nazi wartime occupation. These issues obviously could not be broached freely under communism, but even now the engagement is a complex and contested process, occurring under multiple pressures.¹¹⁰ On the one hand, these issues were actively debated as these states sought and were granted accession to the European

Union (EU) in 2004: as part of the effort to secure a foundation of shared values to underpin the enlarged union, the dominant western states mandated to would-be entrants not just a range of liberal educational and multicultural policies, but also recognition of the Holocaust as a pre-eminent violation of human rights and foundational negative exemplum for a united Europe.¹¹¹ (The accuracy of this last assertion as a historical claim is very questionable, given the slow evolution of modern Holocaust consciousness; but there is nonetheless some mileage in considering the EU as a mnemonic product, ‘an institutional edifice whose foundations contain the very lessons learnt from the experience of totalitarian war, subjugation and European-wide genocide’.¹¹²)

These assertions discomfited many in Eastern Europe, not only because of the delicacy and rawness of the topic of indigenous collaboration in the Holocaust there, but also because these western priorities tended to slight the significance of post-war communist oppression as an integral part of the European story. With accession secured, the ‘new Europeans’ have become ever more vocal in their refusal to accept the privileging of western perspectives on the recent past, and to insist that the specificity of their own experiences is reflected in a more heterogeneous collective European memory and identity.¹¹³ The complex struggles for recognition and inclusion here were profoundly related to questions of post-communist national identity, and so in any circumstances it would be wrong to dismiss them as merely symbolic; yet as Maria Mälksoo has persuasively argued these questions also much more directly shaped these states’ ‘security imaginaries, and their relations with Europe and the wider world’.¹¹⁴ Apart from intra-European foreign relations, these mnemonic conflicts profoundly conditioned the Polish and Baltic decisions to support the United States over the 2003 invasion of Iraq.¹¹⁵

On the other hand, issues of collective memory are also highly pertinent in the relations of these ‘new Europeans’ with their Russian neighbour to the east. Since around

2000, Russian president Vladimir Putin and his political allies have revived the Soviet-era myth of the 'Great Patriotic War' as a heroic anti-fascist liberation struggle as part of their contemporary nation-building project. This has proved immensely popular such that, in Catherine Merridale's words, the war now 'serves as Russia's national shibboleth, the proof of its collective strength and virtue in the modern age'.¹¹⁶ Yet this obviously sits very ill with efforts to commemorate and explore Soviet subjugation, oppression and crimes in the former satellite states, and thus to remember the Second World War in a much more sombre, even tragic, key. The sixtieth anniversary of the end of the war in 2005 saw a spike in controversies, occasioned particularly by Russian plans for a lavish, Soviet-style, Victory Day military parade in Moscow to which scores of world leaders were invited and around which bitter polemic ensued.¹¹⁷ On both sides, these issues are seen as bound up with palpable security threats. The Russians, of course, looked askance at the expansion of western institutions such as the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation to their very borders. By the same token, the Baltic states are anxious about the potential danger posed to them by a more assertive and recalcitrant Russia, especially given the existence of substantial ethnic Russian minorities there whose status has been the object of controversy ever since the collapse of communism. This last was manifestly a factor in the controversies between Estonia and Russia over the fate of Soviet-era war memorials – especially the famous 'Bronze Soldier' in Tallinn – in the later 2000s.¹¹⁸ More diffusely yet no less potently, it has been argued that across the region particular collective memories have been 'securitized', construed as integral to secure senses of self, with threats to them consequently elevated into matters of existential danger, often quite contrary to the dictates of 'rational' material interests. On such a view, incompatible narratives are bound up with the 'ontological security' of actors in the region, and profoundly shape all aspects of their foreign relations.¹¹⁹

The particular theoretical claims entailed in these approaches are debateable, of course, but it is impossible adequately to grasp the nature of international politics in this extended case without placing mnemonic geopolitics at the centre of the analysis. International historians will find it much easier to do this if they engage with the methods, sources and conceptual apparatus of memory studies. The utility of this can be further illustrated by considering another issue this last case raises, namely that of the inter-generational transmission of mnemonic attitudes or dispositions, particularly beyond the span of living memory. It is presumably unproblematic to assert that individual policy-makers bearing psychic scars from personal traumatic experiences may well be influenced by these in their conduct of policy. So, for example, American secretary of state Madeleine Albright's personal history, as a double exile from Czechoslovakia fleeing first Nazism and then communism, manifestly influenced her hawkish opposition in Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s to a dictatorial Serbian leadership that egregiously abused human rights.¹²⁰ Equally, there may sometimes be more remote personal factors that might shape a policy-maker's worldview. Thus the hawkish demeanour on history issues of the current Japanese prime minister Abe Shinzo is often attributed to his membership of a particular conservative political dynasty: one of his grandfathers was imprisoned (though never indicted) on war crimes charges in the 1940s.¹²¹ Quite different issues are generally raised, however, when narratives become embedded within particular political cultures and are then frantically and tenaciously abjured or avowed by individuals with no discernible direct personal involvement in them. There has been some rumination on this in cognate literatures on political culture and national identity, but memory studies has been even more directly concerned with distinguishing between different forms of collective memory and exploring how mnemonic heritages are passed down through the generations.

It is not possible to taxonomise all the relevant thinking here, but the best starting point for an overview is the distinction made by Jan Assmann between ‘communicative’ and ‘cultural’ memory. The former is everyday and informal communication about the past, ‘characterized by a high-degree of non-specialization, reciprocity of roles, thematic instability, and disorganization’. Such memories form and circulate within specific communities – especially of participant-witnesses – and are highly dependent upon direct lived experience. For this reason communicative memory has a ‘limited temporal horizon’, extending roughly for three generations or about eighty years. Cultural memory, in contrast, refers to more formalised and heavily mediated practices of collective remembering within wider social groupings, to ‘that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose “cultivation” serves to stabilize and convey that society’s self-image. Upon such collective knowledge ... each group bases its awareness of unity and particularity.’¹²² ‘Cultural memory consists of objectified culture – that is, the texts, rites, images, buildings and monuments which are designed to recall fateful events in the history of the collective. As the officially sanctioned heritage of a society, they are intended for the *longue durée*.’¹²³ Subsequently, Aleida Assmann nuanced this distinction by breaking both communicative and cultural memory down into two ‘formats’, individual and social in the former case and political and cultural in the latter. Although individual memories have a particular quality, once verbalised they ‘are connected to a wider network of other memories and, what is even more important, the memories of others’. Through ‘such networks of association and communication, memories are continuously socially readapted, be it that they are substantiated and corroborated, or challenged and corrected’. If individual memories thus inescapably take on a social dimension, there remain important distinctions between the communicative and the cultural. For Assmann, the familial transfer of embodied experience from one generation to the next is a key mechanism for transforming individual memories

into social ones. Political and cultural memories, in contrast, are not mediated through embodied practice but rather through symbolic systems, and ‘the more durable carriers of external symbols and material representations’.¹²⁴

These categorisations perhaps suggest a growing impersonality and loss of affect in the transmission of memories from individual to family to broader social group to institutionalised historical archive, but others have questioned the ineluctability of this. Marianne Hirsch has coined the term ‘postmemory’ to connote the particular perspective of second-generation descendants of survivors of traumatic experiences, pre-eminently but not exclusively the Holocaust. It describes their relationship ‘to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before’, and to ‘experiences they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up’ – but experiences ‘transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right’. The condition of ‘postmemory’ is to be ‘shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events’ whose ‘effects continue into the present’. Coined in a specific context – referring to Holocaust survivors, and their direct descendants – the concept has been expanded, elaborated and applied more extensively. Of course, questions remain about precisely how or ‘by what mechanisms’ ‘postmemory’ can ‘extend to more distant, adoptive witnesses or affiliative contemporaries’. But for Hirsch this ‘connection to the past ... mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation’ is near ubiquitous: it may not be an exaggeration to characterise the contemporary era as an age of ‘postmemory’. Moreover, in this schema the affective link to the past is not lost. Especially through the mediation of new technologies, ‘postmemorial work ... strives to *reactivate* and *re-embody* more distant political and cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression’. The global memory boom is thus ‘a symptom of a need for individual and group inclusion in a collective

membrane forged by a shared inheritance of multiple traumatic histories and the individual and social responsibility we feel toward a persistent and traumatic past'.¹²⁵

Numerous other memory studies scholars have explored similar terrain. Alison Landsberg has paid particular attention to the new possibilities opened up by technological developments in film and in immersive displays in museums to analyse the phenomenon of 'prosthetic memories', deeply-felt personal memories of events that were not directly experienced but which, whilst neither organic nor natural, are not thereby false.¹²⁶ Similar terms abound, including absent, inherited and belated memory, vicarious witnessing, received history and the notion of haunting. Each offers a distinctive perspective on the phenomenon whereby collective memories commonly 'transcend the time and space of the events' original occurrence', taking on 'a powerful life of their own, "unencumbered" by actual individual memory'. This, so Wulf Kansteiner has argued, is the case in contemporary American society with the Holocaust, which has become part of the fabric of 'disembodied, omnipresent, low-intensity memory'.¹²⁷ Quite apart from the conceptual issues at stake here, these phenomena also raise myriad issues about the evacuation of authenticity and the ethics of the second-hand appropriation of traumatic experience (driven, as one critic has it, by 'ambition or envy or narcissism').¹²⁸ Sometimes such memorialising activities are palpably imitative or mimetic, in ways that might easily be judged distasteful: witness the recent trend amongst young Israelis to acquire mock concentration camp registration tattoos on their forearms as a gesture of solidarity with Holocaust survivor relatives.¹²⁹

We might seem again to have travelled some distance from the habitual terrain of international history, but this literature provides productive resources for thinking about how dispositions animated by collective memory persist in foreign relations across numerous generations. It also indicates the limitations of approaching this phenomenon simply through interrogation of the biographies of individual policy-makers. Moreover, it can also help us to

understand not merely the persistence of attitudes but also the emergence of new collective memories and thus of new conflicts: for, as Barbie Zelizer has argued, ‘unlike individual memory, the power of collective memory can increase with time, taking on new complications, nuances, and interests’.¹³⁰ The cases of contemporary East Asia and Eastern Europe – to say nothing of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s¹³¹ – underline the wisdom of this insight.

3.4 Transnational Memory Work

These empirical examples also lead us into discussion of the fourth realm of mnemonic international politics, which is that of transnational contestation. Memory is not simply an issue domestically within states; nor does enfolding international politics, and the play of memory within particular bilateral or even multilateral contexts, into our purview exhaust the subject. As has become clear, we need also to attend to transnational flows of memories and of normative pressures that impact upon remembering and identity. These powerful forces clearly raise issues of a different order about agency and who the relevant actors are in international mnemonic politics.

The phenomenal rise of a (putatively) global cosmopolitan Holocaust memory over the last twenty or thirty years, a crucial factor in the larger memory boom, is paradigmatic here.¹³² With escalating vigour since the late 1990s, the notion that Holocaust recognition should be entrenched as a fundamental yardstick for civilisation has been growing, and has been enshrined in myriad political gestures such as the inter-governmental Stockholm Declaration of January 2000. This has also led to the widespread adoption of 27 January (the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz) as a Holocaust memorial day in myriad nations across the globe, as well as a host of other educational, commemorative and cultural initiatives.¹³³ The active fostering of Holocaust consciousness was particularly evident in the EU, where it was seized upon as a possible foundation for a common European memory and

identity that would enhance the legitimacy of the organisation, particularly in the context of its successive post-Cold War enlargements. As Tony Judt memorably put it, Holocaust recognition became ‘our contemporary European entry ticket’, established as ‘the very definition and guarantee of the continent’s restored humanity’.¹³⁴ This promotion has taken diverse forms: in 2008 an EU Framework Declaration declared that member states should make denial, or even gross trivialisation, of the Holocaust a criminal offence, thus adding to an increasingly dense thicket of international legal stipulations seeking to police the boundaries of collective memory.¹³⁵

There are contradictory currents here. On the one hand, as previously discussed, these efforts can incite fierce opposition. Politicians and intellectuals in Eastern Europe have insisted that the crimes of communism should be placed on at least an equal footing with those of Nazism, and have produced counter-documents such as the 2008 Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism to promote that case.¹³⁶ The Holocaust has thus become bound up in an ongoing larger debate about the proper basis for a pan-European memory, with competing, often bitter, views in play about its rightful components.¹³⁷ On the other hand, the Holocaust has simultaneously become established as an icon and touchstone, a benchmark for human suffering in the modern age, invested with universal meaning and significance. It is also inextricably entangled with a whole series of other norms of human rights, apology and reparation, and justice and regret. (It might also be noted here that the very idea that coming to terms with the past by working through trauma is a pre-requisite for societal health is another such norm, insistently prescribed to the states of Eastern Europe by the reunified Germany and others after the Cold War.¹³⁸)

These mnemonic standards are now clearly operative on a global scale, which transforms the possibilities for all memory work: indeed, it has been argued that over the last decade ‘under the impact of globalizing processes, both the spaces of memory and the

composition of memory communities have been redefined'. There are at least three different elements to this. First, the emergence of 'a global public sphere ... has turned memory into an issue of global accountability'. Politicians and governments must now be conscious that their actions in respect of past abuses and injustices will be subject to scrutiny by a demanding worldwide audience. Second, 'memory claims themselves are increasingly globalized'. This is most evident in the way in which the Holocaust has emerged as a universal point of comparison, and is explicitly used to legitimise other legal and moral claims; but in general there is now a more thoroughgoing comparative, even competitive, impulse in play whenever claims are advanced. Third, 'even in cases in which memory is not invested with universal claims, contemporary debates about the past are nevertheless informed by the global context in which they unfold'. This means that memories at all levels – individual, local, national and supraregional – are 'shaped and transformed in correspondence with and in response to the challenges of globalization'. One crucial factor here is 'the emergence of new transnational memory alliances as a consequence of, and sometimes as a reaction to, global flows and interactions'.¹³⁹

The remarkable proliferation of the number and range of non-state actors concerned with mnemonic politics is absolutely central here. The intersection of the general growth of non-governmental organisations in the post-Cold War world with the spread of norms connected to human rights has produced a new – or at least vastly expanded – terrain of transnational activism. 'The victims of past injustices are supported by a growing network of international institutions and nongovernmental groups, such as the International Criminal Court and Amnesty International, who wish to help them recover from their trauma and to deter the reoccurrence of similar abuses in the future.'¹⁴⁰ Repeatedly, transnational coalitions have coalesced to pursue high profile campaigns. So in the 1990s, American lawyers, human rights activists and representatives of Jewish organizations across the globe helped pressurise

Swiss banks over the failure to restore assets held on behalf of Holocaust victims.¹⁴¹ (Witness also the case of the ‘comfort women’.) Yet the sheer range of non-state actors involved in mnemonic politics today is staggering, also encompassing film-makers, novelists, musicians, artists, philanthropists and private individuals; moreover, their activities involve far more than specific campaigns for compensation or restitution. For example, there is increasingly a transnational dimension to memorial endeavours. A haunting new memorial complex opened in 2004 at the site of the Bełżec extermination camp in Poland was the product of a collaborative initiative propelled by a local Holocaust survivor Miles Lerman, but also involving the Polish government, the American Jewish Committee, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and numerous private donors.¹⁴² Equally, in 2012 Russian billionaires helped fund a massive new memorial to the Red Army dedicated in Netanya in Israel.¹⁴³

New digital and networked technologies underpin and facilitate much of this activism. The post-Cold War emergence of these constitutes a revolutionary shift that ‘fundamentally changes the paradigms for understanding, engaging with, and owning the past’.¹⁴⁴ Almost every museum exhibition, television programme, commemorative event, and re-enactment society now has a parallel web presence, coupling ‘real world’ activities with a virtual dimension. (The USHMM has even established a branch in the virtual world of Second Life.) Equally, the internet facilitates stand-alone forms of remembrance such as YouTube videos, Wikipedia entries, blogs, Twitter feeds, apps, Facebook groups, and ‘virtual memorial’ websites of every conceivable kind. Digital representations are accessible anywhere across the globe, to anyone with a PC, laptop, tablet, or smartphone, allowing not merely for the unprecedented production and accumulation of memories but also for their exchange. This gives particular representations a potentially limitless reach, and also means that individuals have at their fingertips a vast global database of documents, photographs, and videos – no

previous generation has had such opportunities to access so much information about the past, almost instantaneously.

This information revolution is also democratising, undermining established hierarchies and empowering individuals and groups to participate in shaping public consciousness. Not all voices in a conversation have equal authority, of course, but Web 2.0 applications certainly allow for a greater number to be heard. The internet is thus ‘a babel of contending narratives’, flowing across national boundaries.¹⁴⁵ The development of these modes of connectivity has permitted the emergence of a new public sphere, as ‘decisive events are increasingly witnessed synchronically in real time by a worldwide spectatorship in a global arena of attention’.¹⁴⁶ Social networks are vital tools of mobilisation, coordination and publicity for protest movements as was amply demonstrated during the extended ‘Arab Spring’. The emergence of new networked publics also allows for the establishment of global iconic figures of victimhood and martyrdom, such as Neda Agha-Soltan, the student shot dead during election protests in Iran in 2009: her image publicised a particular protest movement but also drew strength from and reinscribed a wider discourse of human rights.¹⁴⁷ The same tools are equally useful for raising awareness, issuing provocations and coordinating action in historical activism. Every controversial topic in contemporary memory politics is vociferously and endlessly debated across social networks; this is especially evident at times of crisis such as in the aftermath of the April 2010 plane crash tragedy which opened a new phase in the transnational contestation of the 1940 Katyn massacres.¹⁴⁸ So, ‘under the impact of the digital as a forceful accelerant, memories themselves have become more mobile, ephemeral and fluid, undergoing constant transformations.’¹⁴⁹

Attending to these phenomena reveals a dense and tangled tapestry of international and transnational memory work, with non-state actors crucial carriers both of particular memories and also of universalising norms. The range of activities entailed here, their often evanescent

nature, and the sheer diversity of agents involved makes this extremely difficult to capture for scholarly analysis, and certainly impossible to gauge using conventional approaches. Yet this memory work is clearly a significant part of the fabric of contemporary international politics with which future international historians will have to reckon.

4. Debating the Claims of Memory

Despite its length, the discussion here is not exhaustive. My purpose has simply been to make the case for a more extensive and systematic analysis of collective memory in international history, to outline the putative terrain of that inquiry and to point to some potentially productive connections with the burgeoning memory studies literature. As the nature of international politics changes, international historians will find that memory studies scholars have already devoted extensive attention to the relevant phenomena, and so the empirical benefits of engaging with that literature will be significant. But by the same token, major theoretical insights will accrue from engagement with the substantial conceptual armoury of memory studies.

Greater engagement with collective memory will provide an invigorating way forward for ‘culturalism’ in international history. It will contribute to a yet thicker description of the world-view of policy-makers and of the complex processes of cultural construction in foreign relations. Taking collective memory more seriously means analysing it as a determinant of consciousness and social relations, attending to it as a shaper of elite and public perceptions, and gauging how as part of nations’ fabric of being in the world it conditions their behaviour externally. Exploring the wide range of discourses through which memory is produced and contested will also further expand our understanding of what constitutes the terrain of international politics. In the more purely international realm, bringing memory into focus will cast new light on the nature and sources of conflict in international relations, and of the possible dynamics of reconciliation. Moreover, it will illuminate a whole further dimension

of politics in the form of transnational flow of memories and norms. Thus work on collective memory has the capacity to bring together, even to reunite, two core threads in the ‘culturalist’ project. On the one hand, it would mark a new departure in the ‘discourse analysis’ of policy-making; yet on the other, and simultaneously, it would develop transnational approaches with their characteristic concern for the role of non-state actors and global flows in the international system.

This argument is likely to prove less palatable to those who are not already adepts of ‘culturalism’. Drawing on experience of previous disciplinary debates, two key potential objections from ‘mainstream’ practitioners have been anticipated above. First, there is the contention that ‘culturalism’ of the kind advocated here does not really offer anything new: since sophisticated international historians have long attended to the ideational aspects of foreign policy-making – to the unspoken assumptions and worldviews of policy-makers – ‘culturalists’ are merely ‘reinventing the wheel’ with added obfuscatory jargon.¹⁵⁰ This charge is pertinent given the existing literatures on analogies in decision-making and the mental maps of policy-makers, but there are strong reasons to conclude that approaches drawing on memory studies would produce qualitatively different insights. Second, there is the claim that a focus on collective memory lacks significant explanatory power because its emphasis on the ideational neglects the real and fundamental issues at stake in international politics. This has been extensively rehearsed in general discussions, and largely involves conflicting foundational assumptions rather than testable propositions; it can only be reiterated that ‘culturalism’ does not deny the material but insists that how it is perceived and how actors respond to it is always shaped by their culturally constructed perceptions. Moreover, there is rapidly accumulating empirical evidence that ‘the past has been politicized as never before’ and that the question of what kind of ‘official historical narrative’ states

choose to promote 'has become a salient feature of both domestic and international politics'.¹⁵¹

There is a third possible objection which potentially has greater traction. This would contend that memory-based approaches cannot significantly illuminate international history because collective memories are not in fact especially pervasive in the long run of international politics. There may be a few cases where historic grievances fester and envenom international affairs, but these are exceptional. Moreover, in so far as collective memory has become visible, this is a very recent development and the product of a set of contingencies that will not necessarily endure. Thus there is no particular reason to pay inordinate attention to collective memory within the historical study of international relations, and certainly no grounds to consider it as offering some sort of new master key. This charge merits consideration, since after all much of the literature on our contemporary obsessive concern with the past stresses precisely that international politics has changed very recently under the impact of factors such as rising Holocaust consciousness, globalisation and technological change.

One possible response would be that the contemporary significance in international politics of collective memories, and associated issues of justice and human rights, is difficult to gainsay in the light of the proliferating fertile literature devoted to anatomising and explaining it. So even if we were to agree that this is not a particularly deep-rooted phenomenon, and even if it does not long persist, future international historians of our contemporary epoch will still need to come to terms with it.

A more trenchant riposte, however, would be that the issue of the significance of collective memory in the long run of international politics cannot be determined outside of the interpretive frames and concerns which we bring to bear upon it. Arguably, the dynamic in play here is no different to that pertaining with previous innovations in the compass of

international history. Repeatedly over the last century, developments in the contemporary world have sensitised historians of the international to new phenomena, whereupon they have looked back into the past and found them to be there, not merely significant but even ubiquitous.¹⁵² This was true of the post-Second World War expansion of the field, as the apparently increasing complexity of international affairs, and especially the salience of economic and social issues, propelled the shift from a narrower diplomatic history to a more capacious international history, attentive to wider themes. (It might be added that intellectual shifts and the emergence of new academic fields challenging the institutional and explanatory power of diplomatic history also played a part here.)

The same can be said of the more recent emergence of transnational history. This was engendered by the proliferation of international organisations and non-state actors, the perceived decline of the nation-state under the impact of globalisation and the appearance of ever more potent transnational processes. (Witness Anders Stephanson's prescient prediction in 1994: 'as the thirty-year rule carries us further into the moment of transnational economies and mass culture, diplomatic history will decreasingly be about the history of diplomacy.'¹⁵³) Yet once historians became sensitised to them, they began to find transnational flows and processes in the deeper past too: these were hiding in plain sight, having never previously been considered fully relevant to our concerns. Thus in addition to work on the recent past and the Cold War, international historians are now extensively exploring transnationalism in the inter-war years, and the histories of European imperialism are replete with discussion of transnational networks and flows.¹⁵⁴ This suggests that we should not too glibly invoke the existence of an objective reality to the international system that can itself determine what we should study, or which is accessible independently of the lenses through which we choose to perceive it (even though, of course, some lenses will prove more fruitful than others in

practice). Furthermore, on the basis of the recent literature the purview of memory studies is certainly not limited to the very recent past.¹⁵⁵

Surveying the cutting edge of memory studies today also suggests the possibility of an even more robust argument, which would challenge the prescriptions advanced here as if anything too timid. ‘Over the last decade’, Aleida Assmann has asserted, ‘the conviction has grown that culture is intrinsically related to memory.’¹⁵⁶ Developing this point, Alon Confino has suggested that memory is on its way to becoming a new master concept for how we think about the world. Memory studies, he writes, has ‘changed the way historians understand the presence of the past in the life of people in the past by making it into an essential empirical, analytical, and theoretical tool with which to understand social, political, cultural, even economic phenomena that had regularly been seen as determined by a very different set of factors’. Of course, historians had previously thought about the role of perceptions of the past in the past, but this tended to focus on intellectuals and elites alone (as the analogies literature in international history tended to concern itself narrowly with policymakers). What has also changed with the turn to collective memory is ‘the explanatory importance assigned to the representation of the past’. So this is no longer seen as the product of social and political developments and processes but as determinative of them – and these representations are not just intellectual products but ‘exist and act everywhere in society’.¹⁵⁷

Diverse work illustrates the new possibilities that this reconceptualisation opens up. Reviewing Peter Longerich’s monumental book on the Holocaust, Peter Fritzsche noted how central he makes the Nazi ‘false recovered memory’ of defeat and supposed near national annihilation in 1918 to explaining the decisions for war and genocide in 1941.¹⁵⁸ This links to a wider body of fascinating cultural history work on Holocaust perpetration and Nazi fantasies of ‘a world without Jews’.¹⁵⁹ Now, the idea that the discontinuous trauma of 1918 played a part in fuelling Nazism is far from novel, and it did not require memory studies to

exist for it to be formulated; but the vocabulary and conceptual apparatus of memory studies do help us to frame it in fruitful new ways. This is further demonstrated by Neil Gregor's landmark work on Nuremberg after 1945, which Frank Biess has argued marks 'a kind of methodological culmination point in memory studies more generally': 'much like "class" or "experience" in the community studies by social historians of the 1970s and 1980s, "memory" is deployed here not simply as a form of representation but rather as an overarching paradigm that determines social relations, political conflicts, and struggles over economic resources.'¹⁶⁰ Dan Stone has written in a similar vein of the 'memory wars' that have beset Europe since the end of the Cold War, and is completing an innovative history of post-1945 Europe which is systematically structured around the rise and fall of anti-fascist collective memories in both east and west.¹⁶¹

Memory studies has documented 'in wholly new ways the fundamental importance of the presence of the past in human society'. It is elucidating 'whether and in what way, the presence of memory is not so much a manifestation of the society around it, but a shaper of politics, society, and culture, and of beliefs and values, as well as of everyday life, institutional settings, and the processes of decision-making'. It asks 'how influential the category of memory was in making social, political, economic, and everyday-life decisions'. On this view memory is '*essential* for understanding problems in social, political, and economic history' – and, we might add, international history.¹⁶² This should certainly give us food for thought: it represents an immense challenge for our field.

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